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*Labor's Role in
World Affairs*

by BERNARD WIESMAN

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LABOR'S ROLE IN WORLD AFFAIRS

by Bernard Wiesman¹

American labor is so important a segment of the American population and so dynamic a force in American economics and politics that it must play a major part in the shaping of American diplomacy. Even if labor were to remain completely silent, its very silence would influence American policy and remove one of the most potent influences which now constitute America's activity in world affairs.

Labor's role in world affairs is obviously that of one section of the American people and presupposes similar activity by other elements of American life whether they be in industry or agriculture, in religion or in education.

Labor is more than a numerical portion of the American population so far as world affairs are concerned. Labor has a special significance in the production of essentials of national life and of international trade. In addition, it has a particular importance in people-to-people relationships. In the present phase of world progress, working people are in the lead in what might be described as a revolutionary development. In some of the older industrial countries, labor has come of age and has begun to exercise the duties of the head of the family. In newer countries, there is an almost frantic haste to bridge within months or years the experience of many centuries. In such areas, working people are being invited to take on roles of responsibility in the political, social, and economic life of their country for which they have lacked even the most elementary of the three R's. Whether this situation is good or bad

¹This article is based on an address delivered before the eight annual conference of the Labor Education Association at Swarthmore, Pa., on June 17.

is not the question. It is a fact, and we must try as a nation to face facts and to build upon them the structures which, in the long range, will be in the best interests of all concerned.

Control of the organized labor movement of the world is among the foremost objectives for which the Kremlin is now waging its cold war. Labor's role in world affairs, therefore, becomes a matter of major significance to our country as a whole. Leaders in AFL, CIO, and Railway Brotherhoods have a keen realization of that fact and have taken effective steps aimed to checkmate the Cominform's program as exemplified in the so-called World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

Labor's Role in Promoting Freedom

What organized labor can do to promote the basic freedoms in the present world is a responsibility for labor to decide. The Department of State has no desire to dictate to labor what it should do or to try to control what labor does. We know that we neither have the right nor the wisdom to manage the affairs of a free world labor movement. The Department of State realizes the fundamental truth in what President Truman recently said concerning the effectiveness of American labor's testimony among workers in other lands.

The Department, therefore, asks the trade-union leaders of this country to carry America's message abroad through all available channels and to see that workers in other lands come to know what our freedoms mean and to choose those freedoms as their way of life. We want American trade unionists to show other workers that the strength of our nation is in its freedom, its friendliness, its

hope of helping others, its moral principles. We want American trade unionists to show workers of other lands that the American worker is about as close as anyone can get to the average American citizen, that he is a hard-working decent guy who aims to earn his pay and get more of it, using it for a comfortable living for his family, going to church on Sunday, and sending his youngsters to school and many of them to college.

If the masses of workers in other lands could know American workers as they are, they would reject instinctively the deceits of the Cominform, which are predicated upon the thesis that American workers are either fools or knaves. The kind of false propaganda which they peddle is based upon the fiction that American labor leaders are the tools of the State Department and that the State Department is the tool of Wall Street.

The propagandists of the so-called World Federation of Trade Unions attack the new International Confederation of Free Trade Unions as a sort of Titoist deviationism and label it the "Yellow Internationale." They use that label in countries outside of the Orient. In that area, they presumably use a different adjective.

Labor's Contribution to International Cooperation

The trade-union centers of this country, AFL, CIO, and Railway Labor Executives, are actively committed to a program of international cooperation to advance free trade unionism and to unmask and discredit the WFTU as the satellite of the Cominform. The AFL, the CIO, and the United Mine Workers all participated in the founding, last December at London, of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The Railway Labor Executives understandably make their international cooperation through the ICFTU-affiliated International Transportworkers' Federation (ITF). Credit should be acknowledged to the part played by two great American trade unionists in bringing about the affiliation of the Railway Labor Executives with the ITF at a time when it was the sole rallying point of international opposition to the WFTU. I refer to the late Bob Watt, of the AFL, and the late Harry Frazer, of the Railway Labor Executives.

Membership in these world organizations is by no means the only evidence of AFL or CIO activity internationally. Both have standing in-

ternational committees composed of executive council members and full-time international representatives. Both devote an extensive portion of the time of the annual conventions to international affairs and the President and Secretary-Treasurer of each take direct personal interest in the international activity.

The Free Trade Union Committee of the AFL has been an active and constructive force in Europe and Asia. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers is an example of international activity by one of the great trade unions of the CIO. The UAW is another CIO union which has shown initiative in international activity. A further example, perhaps the most dramatic because of its far-reaching influence is the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

The specialized Latin American activities of the AFL, and of the CIO, should also be noted especially in view of this country's good-neighbor policy.

Traditional ties with other countries have also brought fraternal relations between the trade-union movements. A half-century practice of exchanging fraternal delegates has knit a bond between the AFL and the British Trades Union Congress, while both AFL and CIO have sent special representatives to Italy and Israel to help the trade-union movements there meet their postwar problems.

Trade-union dollars are backing up the words of convention resolutions, and day-to-day efforts of trade-union leaders abroad are translating the policies of international committees.

Activities of International Labor Organizations

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions is the trade-union center of the free world to which belongs almost every major labor organization which is free to choose. Those affiliated with the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions and a small handful of others remain outside at present, for cogent national reasons. American labor leaders have tried hard to secure the affiliation of all trade-union centers of the free world, but the Christian unions, which are of great importance in certain European countries, have a long tradition of international collaboration to seek Christian ideals of employer-worker relations as distinguished from the Socialist philosophy which permeates the thinking of their major rivals. Italy now has a unified trade-

union center of major non-Communist unions to compete with the Communist-controlled Federation headed by Di Vittorio.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions with headquarters at Brussels was created only in December. Late in May, the ICFTU held its first Council meeting and gave evidence that it has begun to function. ICFTU is sending a delegation of five members, including two Americans, to make a 3-month survey of the situation in Asian countries with a view to determining what, if any, regional organization should be established. Later in the year, the possibility of a Latin American regional set-up will be investigated. A recent meeting at Dusseldorf, to consider the problems of the Ruhr, indicates the possible development of a European unit. The ICFTU is getting under way as a nongovernmental organization with category A consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, etc. The ICFTU intends to be the voice of free world labor, sustaining the cause of legitimate trade unions as essential in any economic democracy and as bulwarks of any political democracy. All major American trade unions have shown their support for the ICFTU, but it is to be expected that the unions expelled by the CIO for devotion to the Communist Party will confirm that misguided zeal by affiliating with the WFTU.

The World Federation of Trade Unions wears a respectable label, placed upon it by a great American labor leader who had thought that active participation in WFTU would contribute to a democratic peace. He was eager to emphasize that it should be a bona fide trade-union system, rather than a political mechanism for labor, but he has long since concluded that the ideals he sought could not be achieved in a WFTU controlled by the Kremlin. The WFTU was Moscow's major postwar front organization through which Moscow sought to manipulate world opinion, to control the international policies of national trade-union centers, and to infiltrate national centers. It was founded in 1945, and, in 1949, the three major free trade-union members withdrew. They had decided that they could no longer associate with a WFTU which in 1945 appealed for all possible aid for reconstruction of Europe and which in 1947 refused even to publicize the Marshall Plan. The WFTU, free of the restraining influence of the legitimate trade unionists from the

United States, United Kingdom, and Netherlands, has enrolled itself in the service of the Cominform even to the extent of denouncing the WFTU Executive Council member from Yugoslavia severing ties with him as a Titoist, and of divorcing the Yugoslav labor organization of which he is Secretary General, from contact with other members of the WFTU. The color of the WFTU was also shown by the pronouncements at its Peiping meeting late last year. In language of plainly incendiary character, it called upon the workers of Asia to follow the example of China and to overthrow their alleged exploiters in the governments of the new and old nations of Asia. The WFTU delegates at Peiping included a choice collection of Asian representatives who have been in process of education at Moscow for many years and who are evidently being returned to their native lands for subversive activities among the workers in such countries as India, Indonesia, and Malaya.

Perhaps, the best description of the WFTU of today is that it is the company union for the Cominform in which membership ordinarily is compulsory for Communist-dominated unions and through which the WFTU management hopes to sabotage and destroy legitimate, and hence free, trade unionism.

In this hemisphere, the Confederation of Latin American Workers predated the WFTU but rarely has deviated from the master pattern.

AFL and CIO leaders are now working with the ICFTU leadership toward a legitimate democratic regional organization. The sponsors of the Inter-American Confederation of Labor, established only 2 or 3 years ago as a rallying point for unions free of Communist control, are eager to take such steps as will effectuate their original intent in union with the ICFTU. Similar strengthening of two other regional organizations is expected through the ICFTU. I refer to the Asian Federation of Labor which held its first regional meeting in Ceylon last January and to the ERP-Trade Union Advisory Committee in Europe.

Mention must be made of another form of international cooperation among workers. I refer to the international trade secretariats or, as they might be called, the international industrial or craft federations. There are more than a dozen of these affiliated with the ICFTU in a cooperating arrangement which preserves the essential auton-

omy of these federations. This group includes the International Federation of Transport workers which combines national organizations representing between 4 and 5 million workers in marine, rail, highway, and air transport in countries all over the world. The International Metal Workers, the Miners' Federation, the Textile Workers are among the next largest. Only one of these groups has chosen to desert freedom and that one is the journalists' union where leadership was secured on a narrow margin and the organization perverted to Communist aims. Organizations such as the Newspaper Guild have accordingly left the group.

In Europe, most of these international trade secretariats have functioned since early in this century. They have supplied fraternal ties among workers in the great industries, and those which have enjoyed any substantial income have been important factors in the economic life of the Continent. They are not competitors of the ICFTU. They have their own financing through dues collected from national affiliates such as the Railway Labor Executives, the Machinists, the UAW-CIO, the Mine Workers, etc.

The importance of their work is emphasized by the energy with which the World Federation of Trade Unions, having failed to capture the secretariats, has undertaken to set up rival organizations. The WFTU program, originally, was to transform the autonomous secretariats into industrial departments of the WFTU. When the major free unions left the WFTU, it undertook to establish international unions with the appearance of autonomy which could invite the affiliation of outfits such as the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. There WFTU agencies have sought to get the affiliation of any national unions of like-minded leadership even when the national trade-union center has repudiated the WFTU itself and denounced all of its arms and legs.

Labor's role in world affairs is recognized in the operations of the United Nations and its organs and specialized agencies. On the one hand, many national delegations include among their delegates or advisers men and women from labor-union leadership. On the other hand, as authorized in the Charter of the United Nations, international nongovernmental organizations have been accorded consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and its commissions.

The ICFTU and the IFCTU now are among the category A consultants which also include the WFTU. The Transport workers are in category B which consists of the more specialized groups. American labor leaders have been among the United States delegations to the International Trade Organization Preparatory Conference and to conferences of the World Health Organization and of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as well as on the National Commission for UNESCO.

The Operation of the ILO

I have reserved mention of the International Labor Organization until now. The ILO is the unique intergovernmental organization which, since 1919, constitutionally includes in its conferences and Governing Body, representatives of employers and workers who jointly share authority on a par with those of governments in formulating international labor standard treaties. It was created at the urgent demand of a few great progressive leaders at Versailles. The ILO is dedicated to the principle that enduring peace must be founded on social justice and that the progressive improvement of conditions among workers anywhere is essential to the well-being of people everywhere. At Philadelphia, 6 years ago, the principles of 1919 were reviewed by the representatives of employers, workers, and governments of member nations so that social progress could be charted even while war was being desperately waged. The solemn declaration of Philadelphia has since been annexed to the ILO Constitution and demonstrates general acceptance of the facts that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere," that "labor is not a commodity," and that "freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress."

Another quote from the declaration of Philadelphia expresses a concise and far-reaching philosophy about labor's role in world affairs:

The war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of Governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.

In the framing of that declaration, representatives of the workers and employers of this country shared with representatives of this Govern-

ment. The declaration itself was transmitted by President Roosevelt to both Houses of the Congress.

What is an objective estimate of ILO's contribution to the world?

The ILO has substantially benefited the world by building within the minds and consciences of governments, employers, and workers a realization of national duty and international responsibility, progressively, to improve the conditions of life among working people. Many tangible proofs exist of ILO service to member nations, but it has most significantly served by causing responsible leaders to recognize the need and to accept the challenge that remedies must be found together.

Role of the Trade Unionists

In the State Department, the importance of having expert knowledge of what labor is thinking and doing is evidenced in several ways. The Department itself, under the reorganization of 1949, has a labor adviser in each of the four geographic areas, headed by Assistant Secretaries of State, one in the German Affairs office, which has equivalent status because of its operating responsibilities, in addition to the Labor Adviser to the Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, who has active responsibility for relations extending beyond the limits of any single area. Their duties concern the activities and interests of national and international labor organizations which extend beyond the areas of any single geographic area and involve political as well as economic matters.

The Department of State has trade-union consultants from the AFL and the CIO who provide valuable advice and liaison.

Top officers of the Department, beginning with Secretary Acheson, have meetings with representative labor leaders from time to time. On some matters, such as policy concerning relations with Spain and the Argentine, trade unionists freely criticize the Department's policies after careful considerations of general over-all character which included American labor's well-known views on the subject. On most matters, however, American trade unions stand firmly in support of American foreign policy.

The Foreign Service of the United States now includes about 30 labor attachés and labor reporting officers, including several trade unionists, whose duties include knowing what the trade unions are thinking and doing, advising Embassy

and Departmental officers of any significant developments and helping to transmit some understanding to trade unionists and government officials about what American labor is and does.

The Department of Labor also recognizes the responsibility of our Government to promote understanding and cooperation among the working people and the trade unions of all countries accessible to us. Under the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Philip Kaiser, there is an Office of International Labor Affairs with which our office works closely and cooperatively. The State Department does not duplicate the technical services of the Department of Labor in connection with international labor standards. An interdepartmental committee on international social policy provides the vehicle for formal cooperation among the several departments concerned with specific problems. Through that device, position papers on labor matters which may arise at ILO or United Nations meetings are normally formulated.

The Labor Department has a trade union advisory committee on international labor affairs which has furnished a useful channel for consultation and cooperation.

ECA, of course, has formalized labor's participation in its top councils here and abroad.

Labor's role in world affairs would be meaningless if economic isolation were to govern its policies. The ICFTU Constitution declares as one of its aims to—

advocate with a view of raising the general level of prosperity, increased and properly planned economic cooperation among the nations in such a way as will encourage the development of wider economic units and freer exchange of commodities and to seek full participation of workers' representatives in official bodies dealing with these questions.

The pressing need among free peoples is to reduce, as rapidly as consistent with the general welfare, such artificial barriers as lead to misunderstanding, suspicion, or exploitation. It is to be devoutly hoped that trade unionists in all free countries, including our own, can lead in promoting the brotherhood of peoples and finding the ways to make the adjustments necessary to prevent or minimize local repercussions.

Conclusion

My experience in 20 years of intimate collaboration with the trade-union movement of the United States and of considerable experience with the

trade-union movements of other countries leads me to assert that what is good for labor internationally is generally good for our country and all other countries which share our basic beliefs. Workers constitute around one third of the population, and, in many countries, the trade-union movement which speaks on their behalf includes in its membership one out of every three or four workers.

The chief area of controversy usually comes in the exercise of judgments as to whether a specific program is good for labor and for the general public. Honest men of good will can differ objectively in reaching a decision and, once taken, can work to carry out that decision even if it does not appear to any of them to be perfect. One of the most unfortunate aspects of the trial by accusation through which the Department is now passing is that real common goals have been obscured by controversy which should have been avoidable.

I refer to that controversy as I approach what to me is perhaps the greatest contribution which American labor can make in world affairs at this time. Basic American foreign policy is, I honestly believe, designed to accomplish goals which are good for mankind and which are essential in combating the threatened enslavement of the minds and bodies of men.

If that objective is true, as I believe it to be, the next problem is how to persuade the people of our country and of the world that these goals are their goals and that we should all work together to attain them. It is my opinion—and one shared widely within the Department of State—that the American trade unions, in cooperation with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions—can best convince the workers of other lands that they should support these goals in their own self-interest.

If I know trade unions at all, I know that they must rest their first judgments on the credentials a man carries. If he carries a card in a union, it takes him as a brother unless he proves himself to the contrary. If he carries a message to that union, it goes on the assumption that it is designed to be in its interest. So with American foreign policy. If American trade unionists will take these basic American foreign policies which they

believe are in the best interests of their brothers and sisters of the ICFTU and endorse them for the consideration and support of associated free trade unions around the world, they will strike a deadly blow at the propaganda of the Cominform and the WFTU. Labor's endorsement is worth far more than tons of newsprint or hours of radio time by official spokesmen so far as convincing workers in other lands that we are really their friends.

The essence of trade unionism, whether non-denominational, or Socialist, or Christian, is to be a good provider and to share its strength with its brothers. It combines the patriotism of the loyal citizen with the brotherhood among workers which is truly international. With that combination Labor's role in world affairs must be active and should always be a firm foundation for the building of a peace and social justice.